

Selection

Prioritizing Families with Responsive Policies and Criteria

Programs must identify and enroll children and families who are most in need of Head Start services. These strategies and guiding questions will help programs implement thoughtful selection policies and procedures.

Building from a Strong Foundation

Programs should use community assessment data to establish selection criteria for enrollment. Criteria should prioritize children based on relevant family or child risk factors, including family income, homelessness, foster care, age, and eligibility for special education or early intervention services. Selection of over-income children is based on need and limited to 45% of a program's funded enrollment ([45 CFR §1302.12](#)).

As part of their responsibility for establishing selection criteria, program leadership should understand how community assessment data informs selection criteria. Families, staff, and community members guide the development of selection policies and procedures that [prioritize equity](#). Communication takes place in a sensitive and culturally responsive manner. Internal technology, recordkeeping, and communication systems support the establishment of selection criteria. A ranked waiting list is actively maintained and used to fill openings in a timely fashion.

Did you know?




According to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS), a program must ensure at least 10% of its total funded enrollment is filled by children eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). [Children with disabilities](#) who have been evaluated and deemed eligible for IDEA services but are not receiving services count toward the 10% requirement. How does your program's selection criteria and procedures support the fulfillment of this requirement?





The Office of Head Start has expanded its interpretation of public assistance to include families participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)). While most SNAP recipients have incomes below the federal poverty guidelines, some have incomes that fall between 100 and 130% of poverty. How does your program's selection criteria make sure those most in need of services are prioritized?

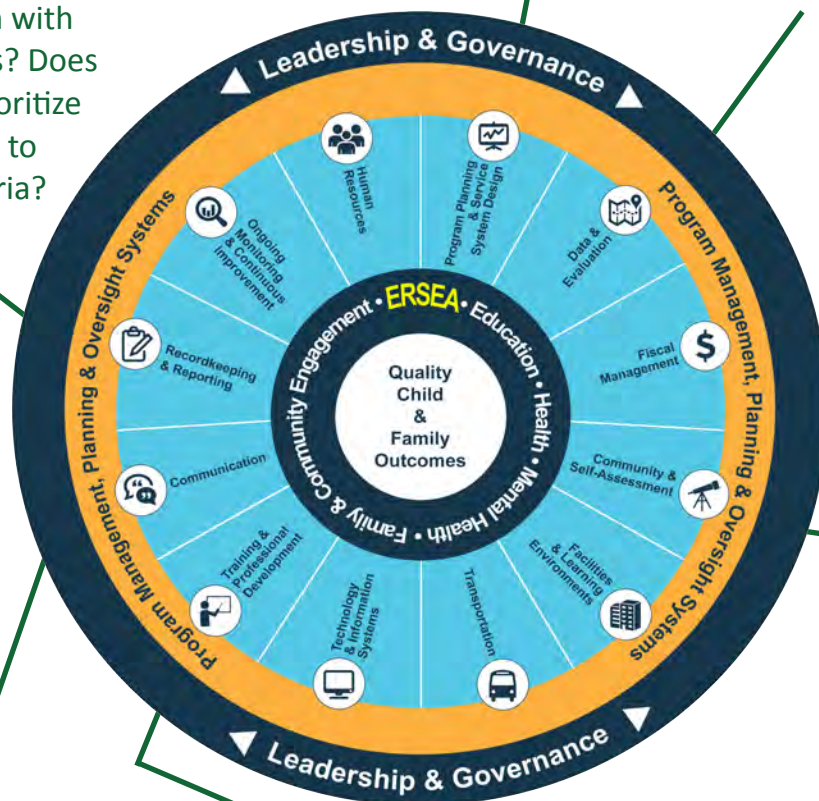



A Systems Perspective: *Questions to consider*


 How does your program's **recordkeeping and reporting** system support selection criteria that prioritizes children with the greatest needs? Does the waiting list prioritize children according to the selection criteria?


 Does your **program planning and service system design** prioritize younger children—where Head Start-eligible children can enroll in high-quality, publicly funded pre-K for a full school day—and children from diverse economic backgrounds?

 How does your program's **data and evaluation** system support staff to assess the selection process and inform future planning and improvement?



 How does your program make sure selection criteria reflect up-to-date **community assessment** data?

 How does your program's **communication** system clearly explain to families their application status, necessary enrollment documents, enrollment appointments, and waiting list status?

 How does your program's **training and professional development** system make sure strategic and responsive selection criteria practices are approved by leadership and maintained by staff?



Planning for Continuous Improvement



Selection criteria are regularly reviewed and revised based on updates to the community assessment. The program uses its understanding of the community to develop criteria, accounting for evidence-based risk factors. Community assessment and eligibility data are used to understand the service needs of SNAP recipients and over-income applicants to ensure that services are provided to those with the greatest need. The criteria also include a scoring mechanism for over-income applicants. A process is in place for testing the validity of the selection criteria to make sure priority is given to the children most in need of services. Ongoing monitoring and self-assessment are used to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Resource Spotlight

[Equity Consideration for ERSEA: Selection](#)

Equitable selection criteria ensure that programs identify and enroll the children and families who will benefit most from Head Start services. These standards will help you examine your program's selection process through an equity lens.

[Disability Services Coordinator Orientation Guide-Recruiting and Enrolling Children](#)

Use this guide to understand the process of recruiting and enrolling children with disabilities or suspected delays and the regulations that apply.

[SNAP Eligibility for Head Start Services](#)

The interpretation of "public assistance" in Sec. 645 of the Head Start Act now includes receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. These ECLKC resources can help you understand and operationalize this eligibility category.



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